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ABSTRACT

A study examined the historical changes that have occurred in the female life course pattern in rural communities in Japan. The family and career patterns of two generations of women were studied from a generation-lineage and age cohort perspective. The older-generation sample consisted of women between the ages of 50 and 79, and the younger-generation sample consisted of their daughters-in-law who live with them. The data were drawn from a 1983-1984 study that was conducted in Shiwahimecho, Miyagi Prefecture. Five items of family career (marriage, birth of first and last children, number of children, and type of mate selected and mate selection process used) were studied to analyze generational changes in the timing of transitional events. Three items related to career patterns (occupational experience before marriage, type of occupation held longest, and present working situation) were also studied. Those women in the younger generation got married two to three years later than did their older-generation counterparts. Both generations of women had their first child about two years after getting married; the older-generation women had their last child later than did the younger women, primarily because the older women had more children. All of the older women had arranged marriages, whereas many members of the younger cohort had chosen their own mates. The premarital labor force participation rates of the two groups were similar, with more of the younger women continuing to work after marriage. The older women tended to be employed in farming, whereas the younger working women tend to be employed full time in small factories or offices. (MN)

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A Study of the Female Life Course

Yoshiko SUGAYA

Abstract

Historical change of the female life course pattern in a rural community was examined from a generation-lineage and age cohort perspective.

First, five items of family career (1. marriage, 2. first child birth, 3. last child birth, 4. number of children, 5. mate selection type and process) were researched to analyze generational changes in the timing of transitional events. Second, with regard to occupational career, three items (1. occupational experience before marriage, 2. type of occupation held longest, 3. present working situation) were discussed here.

Then, findings drawn from the research were examined from the view of the actual social unit.

I Introduction

The recent demographic studies show the remarkable changes in female educational achievement, labor-force participation, marriage and fertility. These changes will be shown more precisely by analyzing the historical change of the female life course — especially family career and occupational career.

Historical change of the female life course pattern must be examined from both a generation-lineage and age cohort perspective. The former analysis will be able to show a clear difference between *Mothers* (G1) and *Daughters* or *Daughters-in-law* (G2) in some aspects, and in other aspects, it seems show a generational transmission within family lineages. On the other hand, the latter birth cohort analysis will have the strategic advantages to study historical changes in life patterns. We can identify "true" or "actual" generational cohorts by finding out which cohort should show a transitional change in career patterns.

In this study, as to the early life transitions in the passage from youth to adulthood, the timing of transition behaviors such as first job, marriage and first child birth are to be examined. The analysis will be based on an analytical framework and a model of American male life course which were displayed by G. H. Elder, D. P. Hogan, J. Modell and other American historical demographers. This paper presents empirical tests of such hypothetical issues as generational change and intercohort change in female family career and occupational career patterns.

II Data and Method

The data for this study are drawn from *A Three Generation Family Study in a Rural Village* survey, which was conducted in Shiwahime-cho, Miyagi Prefecture in 1983 and 1984.

My sampling procedure was as follows:
First, *Mothers* between 50 and 79 years of age (G1) were chosen as respondents. Then, at the same time, their *Daughters-in-law* (G2) who live in the same household were interviewed in order to study the generational change and continuity in family career and occupational career in

addition to their intergenerational family relations. Some other necessary conditions were considered; that is, i) one grandchild or more must live with them, ii) G2 couples (both husband and wife) must be alive, iii) the family must be listed on a register book of farmhouses, in other words, they are engaged in farming to a greater or lesser extent even only in the busy farming season.

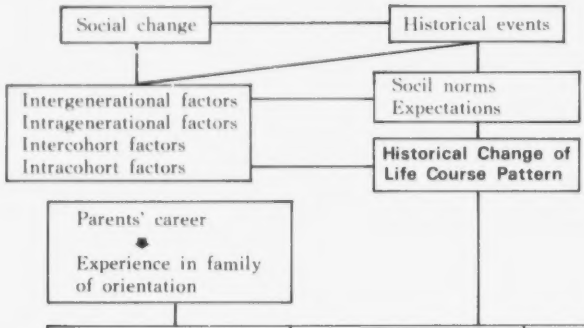
After interviewing the respondents, using two kinds of questionnaires, to G1 and G2 respectively for two years, I analyzed the following available data. 64 G1 cases and 54 G2 cases in 1983 are investigated especially to examine the generational differences in family career. 103 G1 cases and 82 G2 cases in 1984 are analysed to compare their occupational career patterns.

For the analysis of generational change and intercohort change in family career, many items in the questionnaire were designed to aim at bringing some characteristics of Japanese rural female family career patterns to light. Five major items of them are to be discussed here : A. Marriage, B. First child birth, C. Last child birth, D. Number of children, E. Mate selection type and process.

Next, to analyze generational changes in female working situations in historical perspective, the following items are to be discussed in this paper : A. Occupational experience before marriage and the occupational type (only on the women having occupational experiences), B. Type of occupation held longest after marriage, C. Present working situation.

Then, I must display a framework to analyze Japanese female life course pattern. Fig. 1 shows the mutual intercontingency among socio-historical events, social norms, the character and history of both generation and birth cohort, and historical change of life course. In this paper, only intergenerational and intercohort changes of life course patterns may be discussed. But, I intend to pay attention how individuals are affected by their family backgrounds and socio-historical milieu.

As the area collected the data in 1983 and



	Transition to adulthood	Middle-aged	Transition of aging
Occupational Career	School completion First job Financial independence	Occupational status Occupational mobility Longest job Earnings	Retirement Financial Support
Family Career	Marriage Head of household First child birth	Marital stability Residential mobility	Death of spouse Family-kin network

Fig. 1　**A Model of the Life Course Pattern**

1984 was the rural village where was very famous for rice called "Sasanishiki" in Japan, results of the generational change in the female life course will reflect the characteristics of historical change in the rural society caused by such changes as industrialization and urbanization.

How has farming been changing in Shiwahime-cho? 79.8% of working persons 15 years of age and over were engaged in farming in 1960. Then, in 1975, the percentage of farmers decreased to 53.7. In 1973, two factories were built in the village, and now, 346 male and female employees are working in nine factories within the community.

III Findings

1. Family Career

As shown Table 1, five items of family career present clear generational change. Usually, in the analysis of life course patterns, the following three indicators are used: 1) experience ratio, 2) timing of experiencing events by mean age or median age, and 3) order of events as experienced.

A. Marriage

The younger generation (G2) got married later than the parental generation (G1) by two or three years.

The great generational differences are shown in experience ratio in late teens. As for G1, the percentage of early marriage in their teens is 54.0, and the experience ratio by twenty-two years old is 96.8%. In contrast to G1, only 10.3% of G2 got married in their teens. And the experience ratio by twenty-two decreased to 67.2%, too.

The results of age cohort analysis showed the trend of later marriage from older cohort to younger one. The drastic change was found in

Table 1 **Career Items** (Shiwahime)

Items \ Generation	G 1	G 2
Family Career		
A. Marriage (mean age)	19.7	21.9
B. First child birth (mean age)	21.4	23.5
C. Last child birth (mean age)	29.7	(27.6)
D. Number of children (mean)	4.1	(2.2)
E. Mate selection type • Love marriage	0.0%	28.0%
• Arranged marriage	100.0	72.0
Occupational Career	%	%
A. Experience ratio before marriage	72.5	65.4
Occupational type • Farmers	67.6	7.5
• Employees	28.4	88.7
• Other	4.0	3.8
B. Type of occupation held longest		
• Farmers	96.0	44.3
• Employees	3.0	41.8
• Other	1.0	13.9
C. Present working • Farmers	33.3	32.1
situation • Employees	0.0	51.9
• Other	66.7	16.0

40—49 age cohort. They got married at twenty-three years old.

B. First child birth, C. Last child birth and D. Number of children

About two years after marriage, both G1 and G2 have the first child. The generational difference was found in the first child birth in their late teens. In G1 cases, 40.7% of them had the first child, on the other hand, only 5.2% of G2 cases had the first child in their teens.

The mean age at the last child birth of G1 is higher than G2. The age range of G1 cases (19—42 years old) is broader than G2 (24—39 year old).

The reason why G1 have their last children even in their early forties is that they have more children than G2. Half of G1 have from three to eight children, on the contrary, all of G2 have no more than three children.

As these events are normative ones, I will not discuss the order of these events here.

E. Mate selection type and process

The following items were interviewed ① mate selection type (arranged marriage/love marriage), ② marriage area, ③ meeting place, ④ dating and courtship, ⑤ the person who proposed, ⑥ the person who finally decided to get married, and ⑦ the period from the first meeting to marriage.

The difference between a dominant pattern of G1 cases and that of G2 cases is significant. All of G1's mate selection type is "arranged marriage", and therefore *Nakodo* (go-betweens) and parents decided the marriage. Most of G1 had never seen their future husbands before marriage.

On the other hand, patterns of G2 were divided into an elder age cohort pattern and a younger cohort one.

Older G2 saw their future husbands at arranged meetings called "Omiai", and they made formal visits to husbands' houses. Though *Nakodo* arranged marriage, the final decision to marry or not was made by G2 themselves.

In contrast to this pattern, younger G2 fell in love with their mates in the same school or office. I found the fact that they have a dating experience before marriage for two years.

As the mate selection type drastically changed from arranged marriage to love marriage in 20—29 age cohort, all aspects of mate selection process changed in this age cohort, too. With regard to mate selection, there found two transitional age cohorts, that is, 40—49 age cohort and 20—29 age cohort.

Recent changes in higher educational achievement and the increase of female labor-force participation are considered to delay the timing of marriage. But, age norm on marriage is rigid especially in rural community. Though early marriage in the late teens decreased even in rural village, social norms on the timing and order of transitional events to adulthood do not permit Japanese ordinary women to trace deviant courses. So, the age distribution in familial events is narrow, and order of these events is normative.

2. Occupational Career

Some historical studies examined the determinants of women's employment in the period of transition — from a rural and agricultural community to an urban-industrial one (Hareven, 1978: 187). Female labor-force participation must be studied in terms of a woman's position within the family (unmarried daughter/married woman), the family's position within the community (the family's need for her earnings), and the community's economic structure (occupational oppor-

tunities for women in the community). In addition to these variables, social expectation toward women's employment should affect women's work patterns in Japan.

In general, Japanese female occupational career line is called "M line", because, in early 20's and early 40's, women's employment ratio increases. All Japan line in Fig. 2 shows, in fact, M line. These two life stage situations are: 1) unmarried woman completed school in early 20's, and 2) married woman finished childrearing in early 40's.

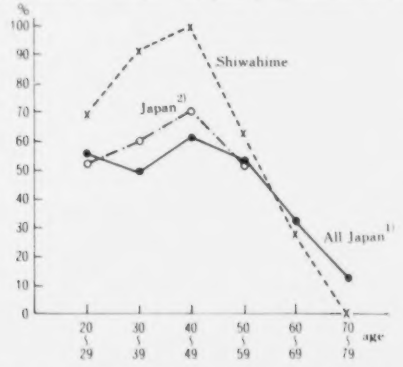


Fig. 2 **Percentages of Women Employed in Labor Force**

Source: 1) Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's office. *1980 Population Census of Japan.* 2) Survey by Prime Minister's Office. *Opinion*, 1984, p.6.

But, female occupational line in Shiwahime-cho, a rural community, is different from women's course all over Japan (Fig.2).

From the view of the female life course, longitudinal rather than cross-sectional analysis is significant to make clear the historical change in women's work. The recent researchers categorized post-marital occupational career patterns into the following five courses : 1) continued work career, 2) entered work after marriage, 3) in and out of work, 4) quit during marriage, and 5) never worked.

Table 2 shows these occupational patterns. The younger age cohort continues to work, on

Table 2 **Female Occupational Career Patterns** (only employed person)

Category / Age Cohort	Continued Work Career	Quit during Marriage	Entered Work after Marriage	Other	
20—29 (N=206)	77 %	19 %	1 %	3 %	100 %
30—39 (N=455)	32	54	12	2	100
40—49 (N=498)	28	50	17	5	100
50—59 (N=279)	35	41	20	4	100
TOTAL (N=1,438)	38	45	14	3	100

Source : Survey by Prime Minister's Office. *Opinion*, 1984. p.8.

Table 3 **Female Occupational Career Patterns Preferred by both Employed and Unemployed Women**

Category / Age Cohort	Continue Work Career	In and Out of work	Quit during Marriage	Never Work	Other and D. K.	
20—29 (N=399)	13 %	64 %	19 %	0 %	4 %	100 %
30—39 (N=760)	17	59	16	3	5	100
40—49 (N=711)	17	53	21	1	8	100
50—59 (N=548)	19	46	23	3	9	100
TOTAL (N=2,418)	17	55	19	2	7	100

Source : Survey by Prime Minister's Office. *Opinion*, 1984, p.19.

the other hand, about half of the middle-aged cohorts quitted during marriage, because of marriage and childrearing (Survey by Prime Minister's Office, 1984 : 12).

Which occupational career do women prefer? What expectation do they have about women's employment? Table 3 shows their preferred patterns. A large number of women preferred "in and out of work" pattern : they want to enter labor-force market before marriage and then, they may quit during childrearing. But, after finishing childrearing, they want to work again.

In such rural community as Shiwahime-cho, some different findings on female occupational career are drawn from the data (Table 1 and Fig. 3).

1. The similar percentages of both G1 and G 2 (about 70%) had occupational experience when they were unmarried daughters. But, their working types were different ; that is, G1 worked as farmers, and G2 participated in the labor force as employees in their rural community.

2. The experience ratio after marriage is higher than before marriage in both G1 and G2. In urban female career pattern, "quit during marriage" type ratio is rather high, on the other hand, all rural married women have occupational experience after marriage. Their working ratio is higher after marriage than before marriage.

3. I found clear generational differences in the longest job after marriage in Shiwahime-cho. Most of G1 cases worked as farmers with their family members ; on the contrary, some of G2 cases were farmers and, others were employees. The transitional point is found in the 40 — 49 age cohort.

4. The present working situation is different from generation to generation, and it is also different within generations by age strata. Women over sixty have already retired from their work. On the contrary, the dominant pattern of the 50—59 age cohort is to be engaged in farming. Women under forty are employed as full-time workers in small factories or offices.

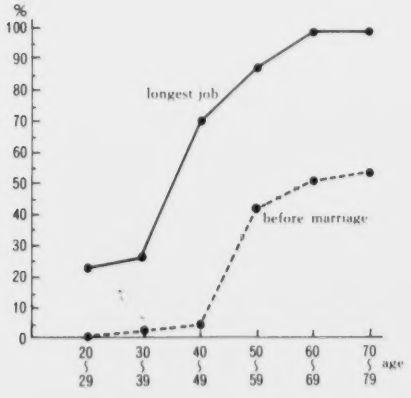


Fig. 3 **Percentages of Women Engaged in Farming** (Shiwahime)
(before marriage/ longest job)

IV. Concluding Remarks

The index of most generational studies was generational status —grandparents, parents and children, neglecting both the historical location and the difference among age cohorts. R. Hill reported the inadequacy of generations as units for analyzing social change and family life style (Hill, 1970). Because of the wide age range in one generation, for example, 30 years, the parental couples must be divided into two historically meaningful cohorts based on the clear difference in life patterns.

Then, findings drawn from the Shiwahime survey must be reexamined from the view of the actual social unit. After reexamining life course patterns divided by the ten-year age cohort, I noticed the existence of four cohort units.

1. Cohort I (aged 70 to 79)

One of the characteristics of this cohort life course pattern is the early marriage. They got married in their late teens without dating experience, following both their parents' and *Nekodos'* decision-making. Before twenty years old, they bore the first child. And then, by the age of fourty years old, they had six or seven children.

Half of them had occupational experience before marriage as farming assistants at home.

As soon as they got married, they worked as farmers with family members to grow rice without any automatic machines. They continued the labor in a rice field until about sixty years old. Then, they retired from farming because of decline of their physical strength.

In later life, they were engaged in domestic affairs, and especially they played important role in rearing their grandchildren who lived with them.

2. Cohort II (aged 50 to 69)

Their occupational career patterns are similar to Cohort I, that is, when they were daughters, half of them helped in farming. And their job held longest is farming.

The difference between Cohort I and Cohort II are shown in some familial aspects such as the age of marriage and the number of children. Members of Cohort II got married at twenty years old and they have less children than Cohort I members.

As for occupational career, the present working situation is different from that of Cohort I. Some of them are still engaged in farming, and others are domestic affairs. But, in several years, they will follow Cohort I's course with aging. In short, the difference between Cohort I and Cohort II is caused by the different stages of aging.

3. Cohort III (aged 40 to 49)

The transitional point in female life course patterns is found in Cohort III. In Cohort III, the mean age of marriage became twenty-three; that is, women have got married later. Mate selection process began to change in Cohort III, too. They saw their future husbands at formally arranged meetings called *Omiai*, and they had formal contact with their mates for six months before marriage. In contrast to this, Cohort I and Cohort II had no formal contract before marriage. Though the mate selection type was the same as the older cohorts (arranged marriage), half of them were able to decide to get married by themselves.

In this way, some aspects in marital career have been changing in Cohort III.

On the other hand, as for occupational career, they did not work in a rice field but learned sewing and knitting when they were young. A drastic change was shown especially in this premarital career.

After marriage, they began to work as farmers by using some machines until middle-aged. Then, after finishing childrearing, they began to be engaged in factories or offices as employees as the community structure began to be industralized. Now, most of them are employed as full-time workers within the community.

4. Cohort IV (aged 20 to 39)

The youngest Cohort IV showed drastic changes not only in mate selection process but also in occupational career.

All of them have dating experience. All members of Cohort IV decided to get married by themselves. Especially, mate selection type of 20–29 age cohort changed to love marriage. I can call this the evolutionary change from *the stem family system* to *the conjugal family system*.

Their occupational career pattern changed

drastically, too. Most of them participated in the labor force before marriage. When they became wives, they continued to be engaged in the same job as held before marriage, such as teachers, nurses, office workers and factory workers. Now, women who are engaged in farming became only a minority in a rural community.

V. Issues for Future Research

Japanese characteristics of generational change and continuity in life course should be a focus of future research.

First, parental perception of their life must be researched to examine the influence on the younger generation. "Parental interpretations of experienced events are influential in forming the expectations and plans of the young." (Hareven, 1978 : 40). In the future research, we must show how great influence mother's life course and her perception of her own life should have on the young daughter's life course. Mothers born in the same historical environment share the same preferred life course. They may expect their daughters or daughters-in-law to follow the preferred timetables in some transitional events. Mothers perceive themselves as being "ahead of schedule", "on schedule" and "behind schedule" in timing of life events. Do the young generation accept the parental expectation or do they reject it?

In the second place, future research should examine social norms and expectations governing the timing and sequencing of life transitions. The existance of social norms and expectations are assumed without any empirical evidence. But, we can imagine how social norms change with socio-historical change and how they differ from generation to generation, and from community to community.

In the third place, we must make sure of the difference between male life course and female one. How different are men and women in the timing of transitional events to adulthood? As for women, what kind of social norms and expectations are important? Which historical event is the most significant in changing the female life course?

In the fourth place, it is essential that future research on the life-course behavior should examine both family career and occupational career. As family career and occupational career are intercontingent, the intercontingency of these careers must be shown by empirical test.

Last, we must reconsider the life course approach. The idea of a life course shifts the focus from family structure to individual's life. The life-course analyst tries to examine the life events from birth to death : from a developmental perspective.

Then, for understanding of life-course patterns, we must be concerned with the interaction among life-course transitions, family transitions and historical change. Historical events such as world war and great depression may affect one's earlier life transitions, and also it will have cumulative impact on his later life. When and how individuals encounter big historical events will affect their life course patterns.

In Japan, FLC Reseach Members researched how the World War II experience made impact on male life course (Morioka, 1985). With regard to female life course, the World War II must have a great effect on their life course, too. Therefore, future research must examine how the socio-historical events which women had encountered in their early lives should affect their later lives.

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